DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 334 607 CS 507 504

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TITLE The Learner's Enigma and Other Codes of Training and Development Videos.
PUB DATE May 91
NOTE 36p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (41st, Chicago, IL, May 23-27, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Coding; Communication Research; *Labor Force Development; *Organizational Climate; *Organizational Communication; *Professional Training; *Semiotics; *Videotape Recordings
IDENTIFIERS Barthes (Roland); Organizational Culture; *Training Materials

ABSTRACT

This study examines the depictions of organizational life appearing in popular training films. The study argues that little cultural attention has been paid to Human Resource Development (HRD), which has become a multi-billion dollar industry shaping employees' behaviors, knowledge and values. In addition, this study extends the interpretive approach to organizational communication, thus making the study of organizational life a legitimate interest for organizational culture researchers. The study relied on semiotic theory to analyze the codes of 14 HRD videos selected from a training film event at the American Society for Training and Development's national conference. Theoretical attention is given to Roland Barthes' semiology. The following codes are found to shape the production of meaning in training videos: codes of dramatic and presentational narratives, codes of learning and modeling, codes of neutrality, codes of familiarity, codes of sophistication and entertainment, and codes of opposition. (Ninety-four references are attached.) (Author/PRA)

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THE LEARNER'S ENIGMA AND OTHER CODES OF TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT VIDEOS

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May 1991

Organizational Communication Division

of the International Communication Association

Chicago, May 1991

(Running Head: Codes of Training Videos)

CS507504

{I would like to extend my sincerest appreciation to Dr. David Descutner of Ohio University; he influenced significantly the interpretation and theoretical strategy for this paper.}

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ABSTRACT

THE LEARNER'S ENIGMA AND OTHER CODES OF TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT VIDEOS

This study examines the depictions of organizational life appearing in popular training films. The study argues that little cultural attention has been paid to Human Resource Development (HRD), which has become a multi-billion dollar industry shaping employees' behaviors, knowledge, and values. Additionally, this study extends the interpretive approach to organizational communication, which has made the study of organizational life a legitimate interest for organizational culture researchers. The study relies on semiotic theory to analyze the codes of 14 HRD videos selected from a training film event at the American Society for Training and Development's national conference. Theoretical attention is given to Roland Barthes' semiology. The following codes are found to shape the production of meaning in training videos: codes of dramatic and presentational narratives, codes of learning and modeling, codes of neutrality, codes of familiarity, codes of sophistication and entertainment, and codes of opposition.

THE LEARNER'S ENIGMA AND OTHER CODES OF TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT VIDEOS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine critically the depictions of organizational life that appear in popular training videos. This study is significant because little cultural attention has been paid to Human Resource Development (HRD), which has become a multi-billion dollar industry by shaping employees' behaviors, attitudes, and values. This study uses semiotic theory to analyze how organizational life is portrayed in 14 HRD videos. To date, no previous study has used an interpretive method to study HRD materials. In this regard, this study extends the Interpretive Approach to organizational communication, which has made the study of organizational life a legitimate interest for organizational culture researchers (Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983).

Training videos and films represent a significant portion of the HRD expenditures. Either as "stand-alone training" (training that does not require a group facilitator or expert trainer) or as a supplement to a training program, training videos have become a primary medium for the delivery of popular management and supervisory development programs. Semiotic film analysis provides an efficient and effective method for the critical analysis of *how meaning is produced* within these films. An assumption of this research is that all training and development (T&D) videos are filled with depictions of how people live, work, and learn in organizations. Additionally, the training videos are obliged to create convincing portrayals of organizational life for the practical reason that they are sold to a general business audience. Semiotic film analysis provides the

theoretical and methodological framework for studying the production of meaning in training films.

Redding (1987) boldly asserted that trainers, "who are either courageous or foolish enough to attempt ideological analysis" (p. 1), may stimulate an organization to evaluate itself and thereby improve the organization and the quality of work life. Surely this is a noble charge; yet, few practitioners are schooled in identifying and reporting ideologies, nor do they wish to "rub against the grain" and face termination, a point Redding honestly acknowledged. Redding's true charge may have been directed to academics who (as responsible members of an intellectual community) should be both able and willing to take issue with organizational practices that constrain human activity. Thus, emancipation from instruments of domination is evoked through systematic study, thoroughgoing critique, and rigorous education: the ethic of serious organizational communication research.

HRD: Setting an Educational Agenda in Organizations

In 1986, Anthony J. Carnevale, Chief Economist for the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), estimated that approximately $210 billion per year was spent on training. For comparison, he reported that $238 billion per year was spent on formal education and an even heftier $355 billion per year for health care. Carnevale admitted that it was difficult to determine the exact amount of all training expenditures due to the varying definitions of what constitutes "workplace learning." He reported that the expenditure for "formal employee training" (that training designed and delivered in a classroom setting) is approximately $30 billion annually, and that another $180 billion was spent on informal training (e.g., on-the-job training). In short, HRD represents a sizeable industry that invites scrutiny into its impact on organizational life.

The Popularity of Training Videos

This study will examine non-customed designed training videos because they represent a popular method for delivering educational information to employees. Training videos have the potential to carry the assumptions of HRD and of management practice to an audience beyond those who may read popularly marketed management books or scholarly investigations on organizational effectiveness. Training videos permit the reduction of dense theoretical material into digestible and understandable chunks, and they present this information through a visually appealing, conventionally accepted medium.

The use of training videos is hardly an insignificant factor in training. Ralphs and Stephan (1986) received 280 (56 percent) responses to their survey of Fortune 500 training departments. They were surprised by one finding: "We did not expect to find 'films/videos' to rate as the highest training method (65 percent) ahead of 'Conference Method' (62 percent) and other methods" (p. 75, emphasis added). They suggested that one possible reason for this finding was that many major training firms used a training video as part of their program modules.

The popularity of training videos is clearly demonstrated in three privately published reports that focused on use and misuse of training films.* Lakewood Research of Minneapolis conducted all three studies; the first two discussed here examine video/film usage, and the third examined copyright violations. Lakewood estimated that American training departments, within organizations of 50 or more employees, are spending $371.1 million on rental and purchases of training films

*The data from *Training Films and Videotapes: Usage and Vendor Awareness and Preference in Corporate America* by G. Ballman, C. Rasinowich, S. Urahn, J. Camery, and K. Klassy, 1987 & 1988, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Lakewood Research are used with permission.

and videos (Ballman, Rasinowich, Urahn, Camery, and Klassy, 1987b). Ballman et al. further reported that the rental and purchase of videos ($269,181,400) exceeded by more than 2:1 the rental and purchase of films ($101,934,100). In terms of the number of videos and films used, Ballman et al. (1987b) estimated that more than 2.95 million videos/films were rented or purchased in 1986--two million of these were videos.

In 1988, Ballman et al. modified the study slightly so that they could measure the expenditures of videos/films both in training departments and across all organizational departments. The assumption was that training managers were not the only people purchasing or renting a training video/film. The results showed that the expenditures for rental and purchase of video and film in 1987 could be as high as $774.8 million. Similarly the number of units rented and purchased nearly doubled from 2.95 million in 1986 to 4.7 million units in 1987 (Ballman et al., 1987b, 1988). Videotape has become the medium of preference for organizational training and is steadily supplanting film.

In 1987, Lakewood Research conducted another study, this time for the Training Media Distributors Association (TMDA), to determine the amount of copyright violation of training videos (Ballman, Rasinowich, Camery, and Klassy, 1987a). These findings are interesting because they suggest the amount of training video usage that cannot be measured by sales and rental figures and further support the contention regarding the wide-spread use of training videos/films. Ballman et al. (1987a) estimated "that 34.6 percent of the organizations in America with 50 or more employees that use pre-recorded videocassettes are copyright violators" (p. 2). In contrast, 48.7 percent of the 815 members of Lakewood's Research Training Panel reported that they never made additional copies without permission. The

report also found that the average organization has 157.4 video cassettes in their library of which 19.4 percent are copies.

Though the medium represents an important delivery method for HRD professionals, no one has examined the content or strategies employed in these films. Latham (1988) cited over 140 examples of empirical research related to training and development; the bulk of the studies focused on attitudinal or behavioral effects on training participants and on employee/managerial perceptions toward training efforts or of training effectiveness. None of Latham's citations discussed the impact of training videos.

The purpose of this study was to examine how training videos produce meaning; it is not this study's purpose to determine how films are used in organizations. The method of display either in support of training efforts or as stand-alone training programs is beyond the scope of this study. It is sufficient to say that videos/ films represent a major medium for the delivery of training and that, given the amount of training video usage, this medium should be studied intensively. To this end, one research question underscores the intent of this study: How is organizational life constituted through the use of signs and codes common to all 14 training videos?

Semiotic Theory & Method

Any research endeavor that hopes to make a contribution to its scholarly community depends on its ability to raise new ideas and offer useful insights. Unique vocabulary is often used because part of the contribution of the research stems from its capacity to import concepts from other fields and thereby expand the domain upon which the research is based. Key terms also become convoluted through multiple interpretations and definitions, and in some cases theorists may be using the same words to talk about very different things. It becomes necessary,

then, to define major terms used throughout this study. These definitions are intended to serve as a working vocabulary of essential concepts. To be sure, the theoretical complexity of many of these ideas cannot be explained in one sentence or in one paper.

The theoretical approach to these videos is most closely akin to Barthes' (1967, 1968, 1972a, 1972b, 1974, 1975, 1977, 1987) semiology, particularly Barthes' conception of semiotic criticism and his definitions of signs and codes (see also, Bannett, 1989; Berman, 1988; Thody, 1977). In this study, the "texts" (i.e., the objects of critical examination) are training videos; the aim of analyzing these texts is to determine how meaning is produced--how signs are used to create an image of organizational life. This study relies on semiotic theory primarily because it represents a fruitful and growing field of inquiry popular across numerous disciplines, including film study (see Deely, 1985, 1986; Metz, 1974a, 1974b, 1976) and the philosophy of rhetoric and communication (see Lanigan, 1988). Semiotic analysis, thus, is used not as an attempt to dismiss the utility of statistical methods, but more importantly as a recognized and effective method for interpreting meanings that emerge in films/videos.

Semiotics refers to the "study of signs." Although numerous perspectives of semiotics exist, they generally agree that semiotics is the study of the process of signification, or the process of how meaning is produced (Silverman, 1983). The elements important to the production of meaning do differ among perspectives. One significant difference rests between the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's "semiology" and the American philosopher Charles Peirce's "semiotics.". The terms are used interchangeably here, not out of indifference to the debate, but rather due

to the synthesis of the two theorists' works into the current theoretical positions.

Semiotic theory permits virtually anything to constitute a sign. Language, as Saussure recognized, represents only one system of signs, albeit a complex and significant one (Krampen, 1987). "Nonverbal" gestures constitute another sign system. A sign may be optical, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, or tactile. The essential function of a sign is *its potential for producing meaning* within or between entities (be these entities people, animals, or collectivities).

Saussure (1966) believed that a sign was composed of two parts: a *signifier* and a *signified*. A signifier is the carrier or acoustic image; the signified is the concept or idea to which the signifier conventionally refers. For example, the word "flower" is a signifier: one may read it on the page or speak it aloud. The signified is the idea which these six letters (f-l-o-w-e-r) are conventionally understood to "mean" or represent. The less motivated meaning for "flower" is the denotative definition as the blossom of a plant or a plant that is noted for the floral beauty of its blossom (Random House, 1987). A flower also contains more motivated meanings. For example, a single flower may signify an occasion in a love relationship or may be used in prose or poetry to represent the coming of spring. In these two examples one is confronted with the ambiguity of the signified. One must decide whether the flower signifies a human relationship or climate change. In order to make this decision, one sign must be considered in relation to other signs within the same context, and each possible signified must be considered in regard to the one signifier. These relationships are governed by "codes." A *code* is a convention that tells one how to interpret a sign in relation to itself or to other signs. A code raises the question, for example, "Is the flower an event to mark the change of nature or an object to mark the maturity of a love relationship?"

Codes, then, are rules governing how meaning is produced within any given text. Fundamentally, codes provide a rule to correlate a signifier (the image) to a particular signified (the concept or idea). Codes also link similar signs to one another. For instance, the presence of the following signs--a desk in a large open space, file cabinets, a typewriter, a telephone, and a woman seated at the desk--signifies an office scene and introduces the possibility that the woman may be a secretary (a culturally driven, systematically distorted experience of particular signs). In some respects, the code in semiotic analysis becomes more important than individual signs, for it is the combination of signifiers and their signifieds that produces a meaning (Barthes, 1972a; 1974).

Barthes' Typologies of Narrative Codes

Important to this analysis is Barthes' (1974) typologies of codes. Barthes believed that five narrative codes worked to produce meaning for any text; his typology included a referential code, symbolic code, semic code, proairetic code, and hermeneutic code. First, the *referential code* relies on knowledge that is not contained in the text, but is necessary for understanding that text. Barthes' referential code works when a text "refers to" something beyond itself, to some previous knowledge that the reader/viewer needs for interpretation. For example, if a reference is made in a training video to General Motors or AT&T, a viewer may need to refer to his/her cultural knowledge of these companies to understand the action. To this extent, a referential code relies on "intertextuality"--conventions formed from one's experience with previous texts. All codes depend to some degree on intertextuality for their interpretation (Fiske, 1987).

Secondly, the *symbolic code* relies on the basic binary or dialectical opposition

with which people understand their world. For instance, traditional oppositions include good and evil, light and darkness, fire and water, feminine and masculine, or summer and winter. Symbolic codes lead the critic to ask, what are the basic oppositions in the text? *Semic codes* are those conventions assigned to a character, object, or setting. Semic codes, for instance, give a character voice and action which are consistent with how one understands (often stereotypically) a similar person--such as an "autocratic manager" or a "mindless secretary." Semic codes operate apart from the person or object, and consequently the viewer accepts or rejects an actor's portrayal of a scene (e.g., an "office scene") based on the viewer's prior experience with similar characters or scenes (Fiske, 1987).

Barthes' fourth code, the *proairetic code*, is more simply the "code of actions" (Fiske, 1987). For example, action codes in television are used so that the viewer may distinguish love scenes, chase scenes, or murder scenes. In training videos, action codes are typically not so dramatic. More often, action codes would be used to separate one sequence which verbally explains a new skill from another sequence which shows the skill being used by people at work. Finally, Barthes' (1974) *hermeneutic code* refers to how a story creates and resolves a problem or enigma.

Fiske (1987), whose work on television culture has been influenced by Barthes' writings, offered a useful conception of how one semiotically reads a visual medium. Fiske extends Barthes' literary codes by suggesting that visual media rely upon a sixth code: "a code of representation." Fiske's representation code requires one to take account for such technologically created signs as camera angles, lighting, editing, music, and sound reproduction.

In order for these videos to work, like any dramatic portrayal on television, on stage, or in the cinema, the producer or director creates *verisimilitude*. Semiotic

codes work then to make the visual and audible dimensions of a film *appear true*. It seems reasonable to assume that the producers and directors of these videos/films make every attempt to produce a "realistic" or verisimilar portrayal of a wide variety of problems and people in organizations in order that producers, quite practically, are able to sell their products to managers and HRD practitioners.

The Science of Interpretation

In *Interpretation of Cultures*, Clifford Geertz (1973) claimed that his approach to the study of culture was "essentially a semiotic one" (p. 5), and that his analysis involved "sorting out structures of signification" (p. 9). Geertz rejected being compared to a cipher clerk, for the cipher clerk was insensitive to the meanings of a text largely because the cipher could only examine a text as if it held some discoverable, referential meaning. In contrast, he compared himself to the literary critic who reads a text and produces a parallel text. The literary critic, like the ethnographer Geertz, must remain attentive to the transient nature of the subject in the construction of a reading (see also Goodall, 1990).

Roland Barthes (1975) held a similar position to Geertz. Barthes believed that the study of society, like the study of a text, was inherently an interpretive endeavor. In *The Pleasures of the Text*, Barthes asserted that a critic must acknowledge his/her own experience with a text while conducting a systematic analysis of that text. Geertz's and Barthes' concept of interpretation may lead most scientists to conclude that all one could expect from such a "reading" is a highly subjective and wholly invaluable report. In their defense, Geertz and Barthes were academics (albeit from different traditions) who were aware of the rigor of scholarly work and equally concerned about adding useful critique to the "universe of discourse" as Geertz described it (1973, p. 14). In many respects, they both were

interested in the *science of interpretation.*

What is at issue is how one can maintain a systematic interpretive method that permits a close reading that is both sensitive to the text and to the reader's experience of the text. An interpretive reading is at once attentive to the structure of possible meanings and to the relationship between the reader and the text. Further, the method of reading proposed in this chapter must remain consistent with the critical interpretive theory upon which this research endeavor is grounded. The critical assumptions of this study are based on post-structuralism and can be summarized as follows:

(1) The linguistic system, not the author, produces meaning within a text; this system both restricts and permits particular meanings.

(2) A text allows multiple readings, and the critic's work is to produce one reading that attends to a meaning of the text, but does not presume to exhaust all the possible meanings of that text.

The first assumption removes the question of "what did the author or director *intend* this video to mean?" The video represents a text independent of an aggregate of film producers who may have created it. The second assumption asserts the semiotic critic's commitment to multifarious readings. Barthes (1972a) claimed that to seek a single meaning is to "close the writing" and that "the space of writing is to be traversed, not penetrated" (p. 11).

Procedures

The videos were selected from a list of 76 films that were popularly marketed at the American Society for Training and Development's (ASTD) 1988 National Conference (Dallas); all the films were available for free viewing at a conference

event called "Super Screen." Super Screen was an on-going conference event that began in 1985 to permit training film vendors to show new or current films to ASTD conference attendees. Nearly all of the films in Super Screen were available for immediate purchase or rental. The Training Media Distribution Association (TMDA), the co-sponsor for Super Screen, was contacted prior to the conference for permission to solicit participating vendors of Super Screen. All 28 vendors participating in the 1988 Super Screen paid to show their videos or films at an assigned period(s) at the event and also participated in ASTD's vendor exposition.

TMDA and ASTD Super Screen divided the films into 21 categories, which appeared to be more conveniently created to market videos, as opposed to logically classified to represent mutually exclusive groups. Due to redundant categories, as well as the repetition of two films, the original 21 categories were reduced to 15. For example, a category called "management" and another called "supervision" were combined, as were "communication skills" and "listening."

One video was selected from each of the 15 categories. In order to ensure as large a cross sampling of videos as possible, a vendor was not represented more than once. This criterion necessitated eliminating a vendor's other videos from contention when that vendor was selected. Agreement to use a training video was sought with the condition that the video's title not be used in the analysis. Because the focus of this study is on the depictions of organizational life found in training videos, the specific title or vendor is irrelevant to the analysis; therefore, videos will be referred to only by a descriptive categorical title. Nevertheless, only 14 videos were used in the final analysis; one vendor chose not to participate. The final 14 videos had an average playing time of 24 minutes with a total composite time of 340.5 minutes. The average playing time for all 76 videos/films was 23

minutes. Total viewing, note-taking, and descriptive writing of signs constituted over six months of intensive analysis.

Codes of Training Videos

The codes of training videos include six general types. The first codes of training films are referred to as *narrative codes*, which seems a more descriptive label for what Barthes (1974) called a "hermeneutic code." *Action codes* are the basis for the second set of codes in training videos and include two types: *codes of learning* and *codes of modeling*. The third general code of training videos is referred to as the *codes of neutrality*, which is related to Barthes' semic codes. Fourth, *codes of familiarity*, a general type of referential code, indicate what training videos consider to be common wisdom regarding popular culture and business; more specific codes of familiarity refer to what these videos call "common sense."

In addition, the *code of sophistication* and *code of entertainment* relate to Fiske's (1987) notion of representational codes. While other codes of training videos rely to some extent on representational codes (which involve use of video technology to produce meaning), the codes of sophistication and of entertainment are largely signified through technically created signs. The final code of training videos is called the *code of oppositions* (Barthes preferred "symbolic codes"). It addresses the dichotomies, or theses and antitheses, necessary to the production of meaning in training videos.

Narrative Codes

Narrative codes appear to produce meaning in two general ways. First, the enigma in training videos rests largely as a deficiency within the individual, and

rarely as a deficiency in the organization. Second, the narrative structure of a training video may be coded as either dramatic stories or informative presentations. This code, found in all 14 videos, is perhaps self-evident when one appreciates that HRD efforts are the *development* (improvement, education, teaching) of *individuals* (Gilley & Eggland, 1989). Nevertheless, this code systematically places responsibility for solving the enigma on the individual. The organization (e.g., its industry-type, management structure, reward systems) may be the context for the problem, but the source of the enigma ultimately lies with an individual who lacks sufficient knowledge or skills to perform effectively. To be sure, the organization does present obstacles for the individual, but they are always surmountable ones for the person who acquires through training the appropriate competencies.

As with any narrative, training videos define the enigma within the first few minutes of the story. Typically, a character is shown confronting a problem which the person is currently unable to resolve, or admitting a weakness that prohibits the individual from being satisfied with his/her performance. In order to resolve the enigma, the individual "learns" or acquires a new knowledge, skill, or attitude. The resolution of the enigma, or the acquisition of new competencies, generally concludes the training video. This code regarding the enigma-resolution includes two additional elements. (1) In all of the videos, the learner must accept the consequences for resolving or failing to resolve the enigma. (2) Moreover, the code of the individual's enigma entails that the resolution of the enigma usually improves the individual's overall satisfaction and working conditions.

The second narrative code suggests that dramatic (or story-telling) training videos and presentational training videos work from similar narrative structures.

The premise of this code is that all training videos do not "tell a story" in the same way. In fact, half of the videos in this analysis are coded not as "stories," but as "presentations" intended to teach the viewer new information.

Story-telling videos include a protagonist (an actor or character) facing a dilemma, often complicated by antagonists, progressing toward obtaining new knowledge to overcome an enigma. Dramatic portrayals, like a telling of a fairy tale or an acting out of a play, represent conventionally accepted narratives because they are understood to be quintessential "stories."

Yet, seven videos in this study may be considered "informational" or "persuasive" presentations that appear to reject the narrative logic of Barthes' (1974) hermeneutic code. These seven training videos hide narrative codes by appearing not to be "stories," or dramatic portrayals of human action. These training videos employ codes of presentational narratives which can be distinguished from dramatic narratives in at least three ways. (1) Characters in presentational narratives are more likely to speak directly to the camera, thereby appearing to speak immediately to the viewer. (2) In presentational narratives, the enigma-resolution process is less conspicuous. (3) Presentational videos use longer learning sequences, whereas story-telling videos use longer modeling sequences.

Presentational training videos are not dramatic stories acted out from beginning to end; rather, they are a presentation of "facts" about the training topic led by "real" people or a "host" (not a narrator) who talks directly to the camera. The camera's perspective in these videos signifies the "you" (i.e., "your" perspective), and the host continually talks to "you"--the pronoun signifies the presence of the unseen, silent viewer. The implication of a viewer is significant to the narrative structure of presentational videos because the silent, invisible viewer

assumes the role of the individual who can resolve his/her problem using lessons provided by the hosts/narrators.

The enigma-resolution pattern is not neglected in presentational videos. The individual facing the enigma in presentational videos often shifts from an indirect character acting on the screen to a direct character of the viewer ("you") watching from behind the camera. In traditional story-telling video, the primary character faces the enigma, learns a new skill, and resolves the dilemma.

Action Codes

Action codes work to differentiate one episode, or sequence of activities, from another; in relation to hermeneutic codes, action codes help to demarcate events in the progress of resolving the enigma. In training videos at least two discernible action sequences are observed to produce meaning: *learning sequences and modeling sequences*. This observation entails six codes which divide equally between *codes of learning* and *codes of modeling*. Codes of learning refer to an episode (or a sequence of related shots) in which a character (actor, narrator, or host) is shown teaching or telling a primary character or viewer information required to resolve the enigma. Codes of modeling sequences involve a character who demonstrates, inappropriately or appropriately, a competency considered essential to the resolution of the enigma. These two action codes have implications for distinguishing story-telling from presentational training videos. Based on all 14 videos, seven presentational videos appear to use longer, more frequent learning sequences, whereas seven story-telling videos involve longer modeling sequences.

These codes of learning usually constrain the meaning of a training video in at

least two ways. (1) The amount of the information is limited to three to five main points; this "code of simplicity" requires that a training video either limits or subordinates the number of main ideas, and it works so that a lesson signifies straightforwardness, simplicity, noncomplexity, and practicality. The code of simplicity seems to apply equally to presentational and story-telling videos. (2) Learning sequences typically include summaries of key lessons, in spite of a hermeneutic code governing either a story-telling or presentational video. In fact, 10 of the 14 videos include some form of introduction and/or synthesis of the lesson; only one story-telling video excluded a review sequence. Curiously, when learning sequences do not appear to summarize or clarify main ideas, the learning deficiency is more likely to be coded as an attitude.

Codes of Modeling

Codes of modeling govern sequences concerning the interpretation of appropriate and inappropriate behavior in at least three ways. "Appropriate" behavior is understood as action taken by a character using the knowledge or skills presented in a learning sequence. Inappropriate behavior involves actions which disagree with the lesson provided by the narrator/teacher and prevent the individual from resolving the enigma. (1) Demonstration of skills is more likely to be signified using inappropriate and appropriate behaviors or appropriate-only behaviors. (2) When inappropriate behaviors are depicted, they are usually the result of insufficient knowledge, and are most likely to precede a related learning sequence. (3) Likewise, when appropriate behaviors are depicted, they are usually the result of having expert competence, or having just acquired the new knowledge and/or skill from a preceding and related learning sequence.

Codes of Neutrality

Semic codes govern the depictions of characters and contexts. In training videos, one finds two primary characters: teachers who provide the information to resolve an enigma, and learners who require the lesson to overcome their learning deficiency. For story-telling training videos, the learner is the protagonist faced with having to overcome some problem; the teacher is the learner's closest ally, helping him/her to acquire the necessary competencies. For presentational videos, the teacher takes the primary role of giving information and showing good and/or bad examples of other learners; the learner is the "you" which signifies an unseen viewer.

Further, in these 14 videos, learners are coded as wanting to learn. Teachers providing specific prescriptions for the learner will often sternly correct the learner if he/she digresses from the lesson, and will provide positive feedback on correct performance. Teachers are always depicted as interested (as opposed to disinterested) people who sincerely want the individual to learn the practical knowledge or skill that will solve the learner's enigma.

Codes of neutrality involve the depiction of people and places as verisimilar, or natural. Codes of equality may also be identified in training videos; yet, they are often subordinate to codes of neutrality. Codes of equality include depictions of people of different race, gender, or status as being "equal." In many respects, codes of neutrality epitomize "generic" training videos because they systematically avoid specificity when signifying a company or location.

Codes of neutrality govern the depiction of both characters and setting in at least four ways. First, characters perform new skills with only average or satisfactory performance. Second, last names are more often used to signify

managerial positions, or to identify a person's actual name. To be sure, first names in training videos show a distinct favor for common mono- and dual-syllabic American English names, e.g., Jerry, Jack, Tom, Bill, Wayne, Mel, George, Ken, Bob, Andy, Doug, Greg, Joe, Mark, Susan, Linda, Beth, Cathy, Jenny, Jill, and Cheryl.

Third, equality of gender, race, or organizational status is more often depicted in secondary roles; references to a character's ethnicity are avoided. The coding of gender and race are more problematic than the absence of references to ethnicity, for race and gender cannot be hidden as readily. In these 14 videos, white males were more likely to be learners and teachers than females or other males combined. In fact, when one examines primary roles as being teachers and learners (those roles significant to the action of training videos), one finds 24 white males, 11 white women, 3 black men, and 1 Asian woman. When comparing male and females only, males were twice as likely to be learners (males = 9; females = 4) and teachers (males = 18; females = 8). Perhaps, the appearance of men in learning and teaching situations appears "natural." Regardless, the code of neutrality depends on versimilitude to hide inequalities that may exist between white males and other groups.

Finally, reference to a company's size, name, product/service, and geographic location are avoided whenever possible. This last code of neutrality addresses how organizational settings are typically depicted as non-industry specific, meaning the setting is either indeterminable or inconsequential. Thus, the code of neutrality limits a depiction of the organization and its membership to only those signs sufficient for displaying the enigma and its resolution; hence, the organizational environment permits little, if any, interference with an individual's acquisition of new and relevant competencies or with his/her continuation of

appropriate behaviors.

Codes of Familiarity

Besides familiarity with business and popular culture, these 14 videos often make reference to "common sense." Common sense in the training videos signifies practical, even obvious knowledge of human behavior in both organizational settings and interpersonal situations. Common sense also suggests that human behavior which is rewarded will be repeated. However, common sense is not used to signify some business acumen, for it is knowledge of human nature (not "business") which is essential to being a successful organizational member. What is held to be "common," then, is some inherent knowledge about how people act toward one another. In this way, the idea of "forgetting" common sense permits the training video to signify two things: (1) that learners have previous knowledge of the idea, and (2) that learners only need the lesson to help them "remember" what it is they "forgot."

Codes of Sophistication and Entertainment

Representational codes, which rely on video technology, support two codes: codes of sophistication and entertainment. Representational codes establish a *code of sophistication* using music, sound, computer-aided graphics and transitions, and elaborate introductions. The collective use of techniques signifies that the training video is of "high quality." The importance of technically mediated signifiers is most easily appreciated when one removes them and notes the effects on the experience of the videos. Representational codes use a *code of entertainment* to signify that a training video is a form of entertainment like other visual media, especially television. To a large extent, codes of entertainment rely on both the actual videotape and on the reproduction of the video text on one's television and

video cassette player--these are familiar signs, which are themselves understood to be "entertainment." The code of entertainment finds further support in the use of technology in ways familiar to popular television (e.g., a television talk show, a soap opera, and a Sunday afternoon sports talk show).

Codes of Opposition

The last type of code in training videos is called a *code of opposition*, what Barthes (1974) called symbolic codes. Codes of opposition are rules regarding binary relationships. In training videos, three sets of oppositions are apparent: teacher/learner, harmony/conflict, and individual/environment. The first opposition is the basic educational relationships: teacher/learner. These relationships create the typical roles found in training videos. The teacher already knows how to apply the skill and solve the enigma. The learner, on the other hand, requires the knowledge and skill to resolve the obstacles to performance.

The second opposition, harmony/conflict, relates to a character's behavior, particularly in regard to the acquisition of a new skill or knowledge. Harmony represents the congruity experienced between the skilled worker and his/her environment; conflict is incongruity that prevents someone from resolving a problem, causing one's behaviors to be unsatisfying or unmotivating. Similarly, someone who is untrained will demonstrate bad, inappropriate, or unproductive behaviors; a trained employee, in contrast, exhibits rational and productive behavior. The resolution of the enigma (i.e., the acquisition of new competencies) most often caused other changes in the organizational environment, including employees feeling better about themselves, their jobs, and their worplace relationships. In many respects, this opposition creates a causal relationship

between being skilled and finding harmony in one's job, and being unskilled and feeling unsatisfied with one's job. This perspective also suggests that individuals experience internal conflict, alienation, or dissatisfaction with themselves when they are unable to resolve the enigma; likewise, individuals are more psychologically secure, satisfied, and rational when they are skilled and knowledgeable and their enigma is resolved.

The final opposition suggests that the consequence for resolving the enigma is controlled by the individual, and that ignoring the problem causes one to lose or not have control, or to be controlled by others. The opposition can be seen as individual/environment. The opposition between the individual learner and the environment is essential to the logic of training videos, for the promise of learning in these videos hinges on accepting that the lesson will directly improve one's worklife by giving one the tools necessary to control specific dilemmas in one's environment. The problem is always resolvable when individuals assume control to resolve it.

Conclusion

In his semiotic approach to film study, Metz (1974a) argued that film was an expressive and influential cultural medium in need of critical study. His statement regarding the persuasiveness of films seems equally appropriate to training videos:

> Films give us a feeling that we are witnessing an almost real spectacle . . . . Films release a mechanism of affective and perceptual participation in the spectator (one is almost never bored by a movie). They spontaneously appeal to his sense of belief--never, of course, entirely, but more intensely than do the other arts, and occasionally films are, even in the absolute, very convincing. They speak to us with the accents of true evidence, using the argument that "It

is so." (Metz, 1974a, p. 4)

Accepting Metz's observation, training videos represent a powerful medium for transferring values to organizational members.

This study contributes to the critical and interpretive works in organizational communication. To be sure, this study's use of semiotic theory with its assumptions regarding multifarious interpretations stands opposed to the positivistic desires for universal truths. This research did not intend to identify a single objective reality for understanding all training videos; rather, this study produced a single semiotic reading of the codes from 14 training videos. Though the sample size presents it own limitations, the variety and number of training videos suggest more convincingly than a single video would that other training videos may create meaning using similar codes.

There are several significant areas for extending this research. Foremost, a critical ideological analysis is a logical next step to understanding these and other training videos. The analysis of codes is a sufficient descriptive endeavor, but it is inadequate for examining the more deeply hidden structures which systematically constrain discourse (Mumby, 1989). An ideological analysis is entirely consistent with Barthes' (1972a) notion of myths and supermyths.

Lanigan's (1988) semiotic phenomenology provides one critical model and rigorous method appropriate for intensively analyzing the ideology of a single training video. A diligent application of Lanigan's work would be advantageous for two reasons. First, it is capable of finding within a single text deeply hidden ideologies. Second, Lanigan's approach is decidedly more phenomenologically oriented, whereas this study was more structurally oriented. Furthermore, the

dominance of the neutrality code, particularly in how gender and race are secondarily portrayed creating an illusion of equality, invites feminist criticism.

In summary, this study suggests that HRD materials represent a significant form of organizational discourse. While this researcher will take up the call for an ideological analysis of these videos, others should consider further critical analysis of HRD activities. When organizational communication interpretivists challenged the dominant paradigm of functionalism including its positivistic methods and managerial propensities (see Pacanowsky & O'Donnel-Trujillo, 1982; Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983), they did not forsake the right to improve organizational life (see also Geuss, 1981; Habermas, 1970). Rather, critical researchers in organizational communication, acknowledging their commitment to intellectual life (Jacoby, 1987), have merely opened a field of fresh possibilities for contributing to human enterprise.

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